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arglebargle!

thursday, april 26, 2007

Mad about Aurora

What can I say? --I loves me a post that opens with Frankenstein. (Alfred E. Numan in this case, is just gravy.) When the issue of Mad that sported this cover hit the stands in 1964 the first wave of the original styrene Monster craze was in full swing. The old Aurora factory building in New York (pictured below at the time of it's demolition) was working overtime to meet the demand. Funny, I had always pictured "Aurora's New York Factory" to look more like a Johnny Vita background painting from a Bakshi *Spider-Man* episode. I guess it sorta does, still --the trees sorta threw me.

about me

C. Martin Croker
Atlanta, Georgia, United States

Animator, V/O Actor, Comics Artist, Archivist, Director, Collector, Writer, Historian, Painter, Packrat, Recluse, Hermit, Crank, Weirdo.

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Battle of the Brothers!

When I was a kid, I thought working at the Aurora factory would be a dream job. It seemed like anything made of plastic that I got really excited about had AURORA embossed on it someplace. But things were different in those days. Model kits were everywhere. They had respect. Every department store, grocery store, dime store ... and even convenience stores would stock at least one shelf with a few kits. In fact, on my 12th birthday I remember actually giving a ho-hum reception at receiving a really cool *zap-action Pirates of the Caribbean* model from a classmate as a birthday gift--but only because I recognized it to be from the Sing food store right down the street by its' price tag. (Incidentally I'd LOVE for somebody to give me that same kit today... It's worth several hundred bucks now.) Even though it was at that this same Sing food store that during the years I bought a couple of hot-rod models, a different *Pirates* kit, plus the Aurora *Endangered Animal* series' kits the Komodo Dragon, Bison and Bear.

Straight from the dream factory. How many thousands boxes of models left the New York factory bound for points unknown all over the U. S. during the years? I *literally* used to have dreams where I would find a box like this, and run around with it the entire dream trying to get the chance to look in it until I'd wake up --and then I'd get *pissed!* (and yes, I am aware that's like painfully sick-nerdy...)

2009 is Bustin' Loose All Over!
R. I. P. Bettie Page
Black & White in COLOR #5 : The CREATURE!

archives

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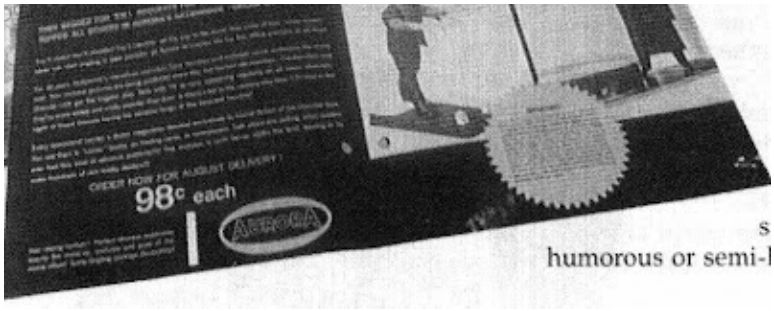
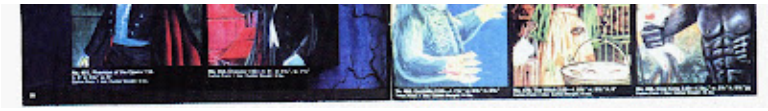
I Power Blogger



Here's an early ad (above) for the first of the first-wavers. Eerily prophetic is the opener "This could be so big, it scares us!' Sometimes you just know.
The ultra-cool thing *here* is --check it out--it's a *different* Drac kit! Too much like Bela?... Or did it just lack that "Comin' atcha" quality the Aurora kits were famous for?

GHOSTLY GLOW-POWER STRIKES!
THE MONSTERS ARE BACK. AND THEY GLOW IN THE DARK.
Aurora has put new life in the Movie Monsters. Wait'll you see what happens when the lights go out! $1.50 each, wherever hobby kits are sold.
FRANKENSTEIN THE WOLF MAN PHANTOM OF THE OPERA THE MUMMY
DRACULA THE FORGOTTEN PRISONER OF CASTLEMARE
AURORA PLASTICS CORP., WEST HEMPSTEAD, NEW YORK
The World's Largest Manufacturer of Hobby Products
AURORA

In 1969 Aurora re-released their first twelve monster kits with new glow-in-the-dark parts and features. Ads like these appeared in comics and full-color fliers.



The really cool Haunted House that graces the cover of the (below) 1964 box set of Aurora Monster paints predates *The Munsters* and *Addams Family* abodes by a full year.

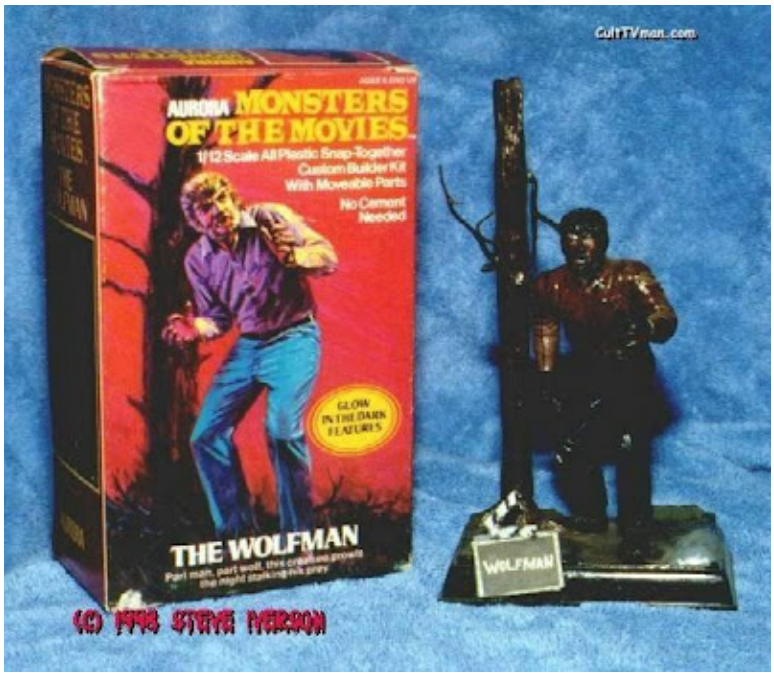
MORE ORIGINAL ART : *Monsters of the Movies series*

Here's some more great Aurora original paintings and drawings...Starting off first with the original painting of the early 1970's *Monsters of the Movies* series *Dracula* kit.

And the Canadian version of the same kit, which featured a much more Bela-looking Drac.

Likewise, here's the *Monsters of the Movies* series *Wolfman* original painting.

And as it appeared on the box with a finished kit.


CultTVman.com
AURORA MONSTERS OF THE MOVIES
1/12 Scale All Plastic Snap-Together Custom Builder Kit With Moveable Parts
No Cement Needed
GLOW IN THE DARK FEATURES
THE WOLFMAN
WOLFMAN

No Canadian Wolfman (Lupe Garu) per se, but here's hoser Mr. Hyde.

And his constipated-looking-by-comparison counterpart --U.S. Hyde.

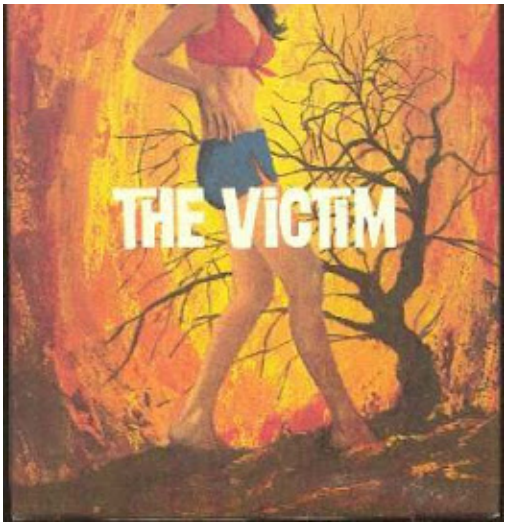
Several "Swimming Creature" variation kits have been done by different studios over the years (Including a dynamite version sculpted by Special FX guru and monster fan Chris Walas) but this one from the 1973 *Monsters of the Movies* series was the first.

AURORA MONSTERS OF THE MOVIES
1/12 Scale All Plastic Snap-Together Custom Builder Kit With Moveable Parts No Cement Needed
GLOW IN THE DARK FEATURES
THE CREATURE FROM THE BLACK LAGOON
(C) 1998 STEVE NERSON

THE VICTIM!

I could really do a whole post just on this one kit alone. It single-handed helped dismantle and ultimately spell doom for the Aurora *Monster Scene* line. Even the image on the box has the feel of a lurid sixty-cent paperback on a wire rack in a Valdosta Truckstop. Even more insane is the proclamation emblazoned on the box "Rated X... *for Excitement!*" Jeez, who approved that??

AURORA MONSTER SCENES
ALL PLASTIC SNAP-TOGETHER CUSTOM BUILDER KITS
MIX 'EM and MATCH 'EM MONSTER SCENES Get all 8! Rated X... for Excitement



The seediness of this out-of-control comics ad even creeped ME out when I first saw it in the pages of House of Mystery and/or House of Secrets. Not only were we treated to the line (concerning *The Victim*) "Don't worry -- This is New York, no one will help her", but --God help me --Vampi's actually drawn with a camel toe... *twice!!*

THE WEIRD WORLD OF AURORA
PUT TOGETHER YOUR OWN SCARY SCENES WITH AURORA'S FANTASTIC MONSTER SCENES CUSTOM BUILDER KITS.
WE NEED A GIRL VICTIM FOR THE EXPERIMENT
NO PROBLEM DR.
NO ..... PROBLEM... HEH, HEH.
KEEP HER QUIET.
HELP! HELP!
DON'T WORRY THIS IS NEW YORK. NO ONE WILL HELP HER
IF THIS EXPERIMENT WORKS SHE'LL TURN INTO A...FLY. HEH, HEH.
THAT SOUNDS SO HORRIBLE IT EVEN SCARES A VAMPIRELLA LIKE ME
WILL THE EXPERIMENT SUCCEED? IT'S UP TO YOU WHEN YOU BUILD YOUR MONSTER SCENES CUSTOM BUILDER KITS FROM AURORA
SNAP THEM TOGETHER. NO GLUE NEEDED. CREATE YOUR OWN SCARY SCENES. GET VAMPIRELLA, FRANKENSTEIN, DR. DEADLY, GIRL VICTIM, PLUS ALL LAB EQUIPMENT. 8 KITS IN ALL. GET MONSTER SCENES CUSTOM BUILDER KITS FROM AURORA

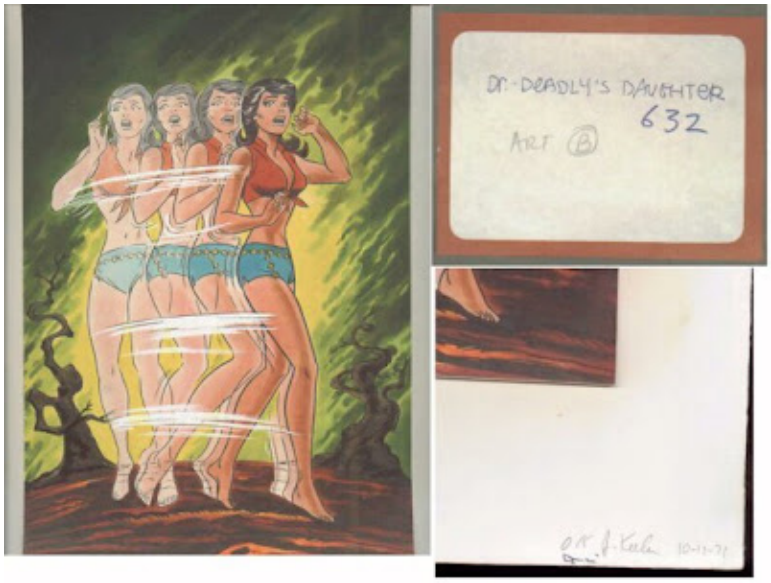
As you might imagine, even in the sex-filled sleazy '70's religious and family groups went way ape-shit over the notion that these little plastic implements of sadism, bondage, torture and weird science could be bought by any bright-faced boy or girl who had the money.

It wasn't long before public outcry led to *The Victim* being retitled as *Dr. Deadly's Daughter* (Which I always thought, if the role is the same... Isn't this actually kinda *worse*?)

Still-- her, and the remaining *Monsters Scenes* stock mere presence on on store shelves

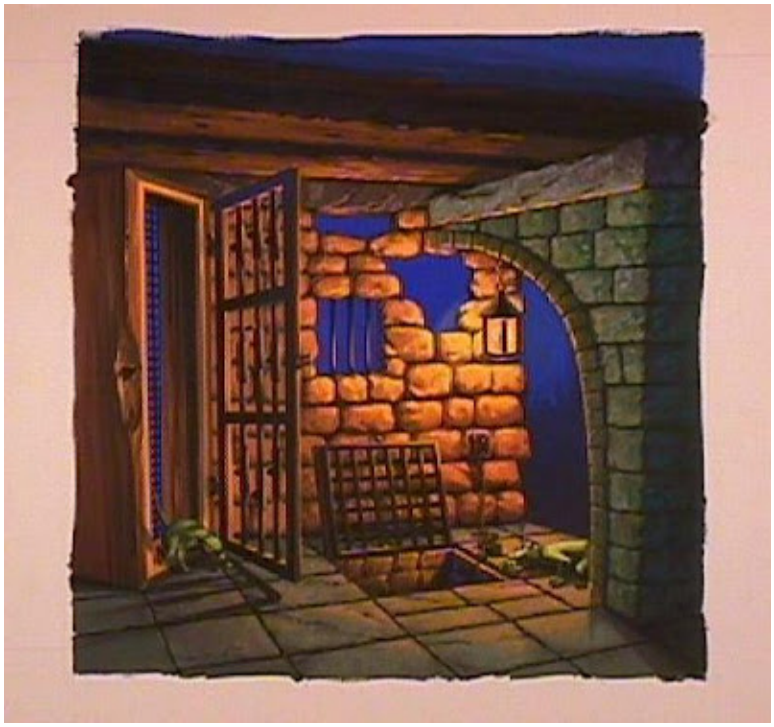
was controversial enough to create protests of Aurora that continued even

after the company was sold to Nabisco. As you might imagine, the new cookie-mogul owners were less than thrilled at the prospect of inheriting a sleaze-merchant moniker along with their toy factory acquisition. It was the beginning of the end really.
Some of the revised art below by Dave (X-Men) Cockrum.



Here's the resin recast of this infamous gal in the form it's available from Monsters In Motion.
With the blonde paint job she sorta looks like a blood-drained bit player in a same-era AIP movie.

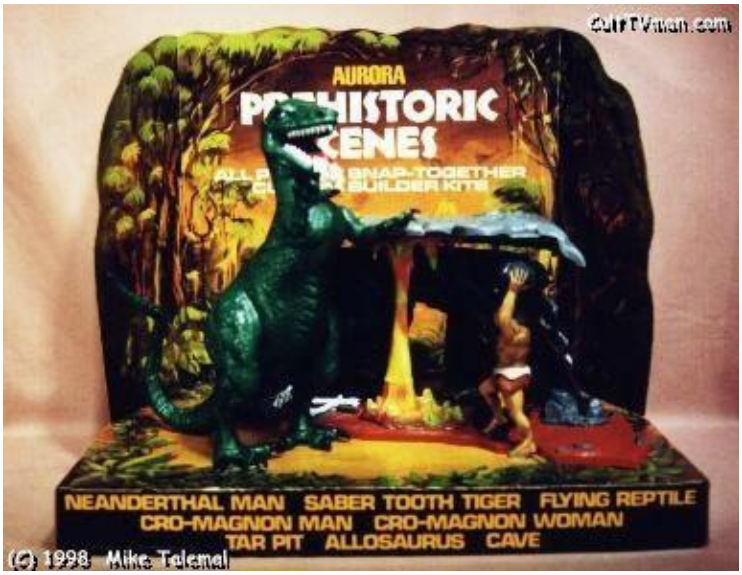
MORE ORIGINAL ART: *Aurora Monster Scenes*



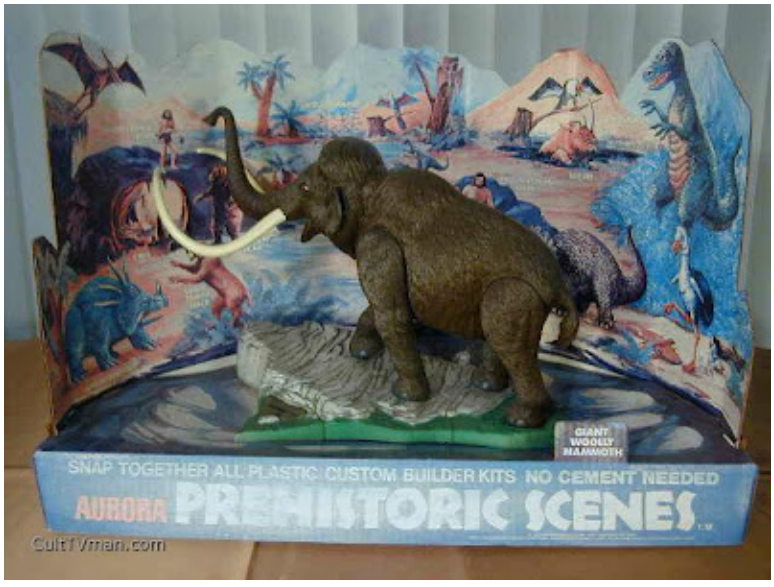
THE GIANT INSECT

AURORA'S PREHISTORIC SCENES:

One night when I was ten I went out for Dairy Queen ice cream on South Cobb Drivewith the Cagle twins (Gary and Larry) and their mom. On the way home we happened to stop at Gibsons department store --just to look around I suppose. But when I walked up on the below display in their toy section I knew my world was changed forever.


AURORA
NEANDERTHAL MAN SABER TOOTH TIGER FLYING REPTILE
CRO-MAGNON MAN CRO-MAGNON WOMAN
TAR PIT ALLOSAURUS CAVE
(C) 1998 Mike Talamal

I went insane for these kits. I owned seven of the original eight that were released. I can't remember why, but I never got the the Sabre-toothed Tiger kit. It might've just been as simple a reason as a good friend of mine bought the Tiger (the same day I bought the Pteranadon) at Woolworth's, and since I sat there later and watched him put it together, I probably felt like I didn't need it. (Besides, --not like it was a reptile or somethin'!) The worst selling of the original eight had to be the Cro-Magnon Woman. I remember seeing one of those well shelf-worn kits at a Reed's Drugs YEARS after Aurora went out of business.



This same set-up was in the display window at *Lenox Toys and Hobbies* at Lenox Square Mall in Atlanta that I actually bought my *Giant Woolly Mammoth* kit. (for *choke*...for a little over six dollars!) At the time it was the biggest model I owned.
I wish I had access to more of the original box paintings from these great 1970s kits, but so far it's limited to just the ones posted below.

The original box painting for the *Giant Bird* kit...

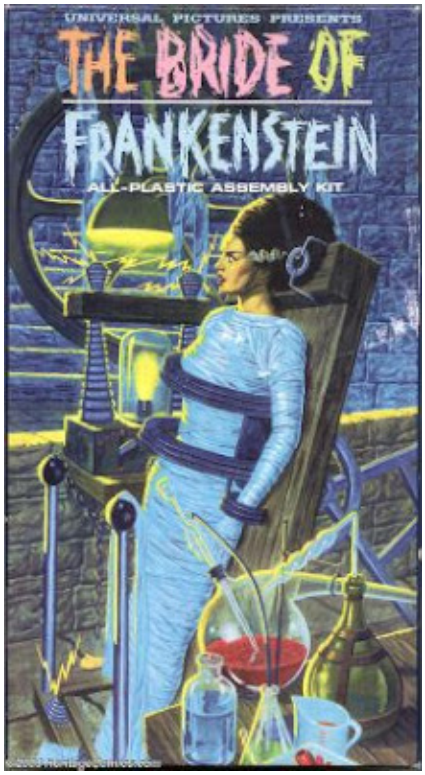
...As well as the firey-skied *Jungle Swamp* box art...

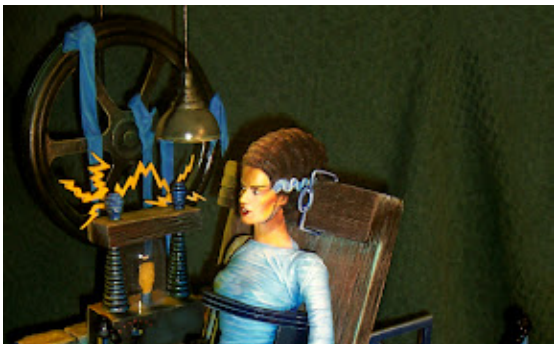
And the scared-o'-two-snakes *Cro-Magnon Woman* wrap-around box art.

AURORA TRIBUTE KITS

As good as the James Bama box paintings were they seldom matched the mood or the pose of the kit contained within. This bothered some folks more than others. I guessin' it REALLY must've bugged this next group of fellers. A few years ago they started to release a series of "Aurora Box-Art Tribute kits every few months. These beautifully meticulous --if not extravagantly opulent-- kits are available through Monsters in Motion in Orange County, if you dare...

THE BRIDE





THE WOLFMAN

UNIVERSAL PICTURES
PRESENTS
WOLF MAN
ALL PLASTIC ASSEMBLY KIT

WOLF MAN

DRACULA

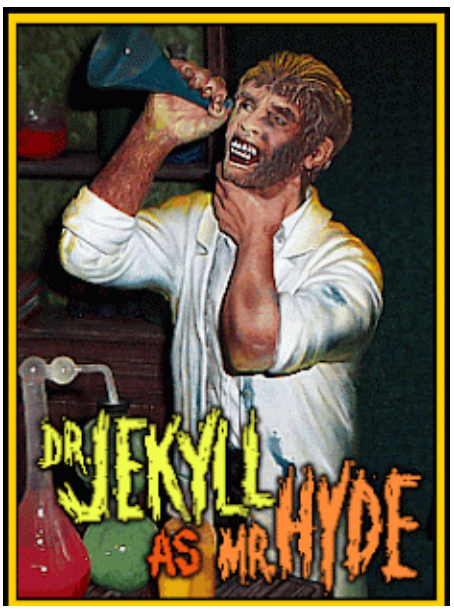
DRACULA

DRACULA

THE PHANTOM

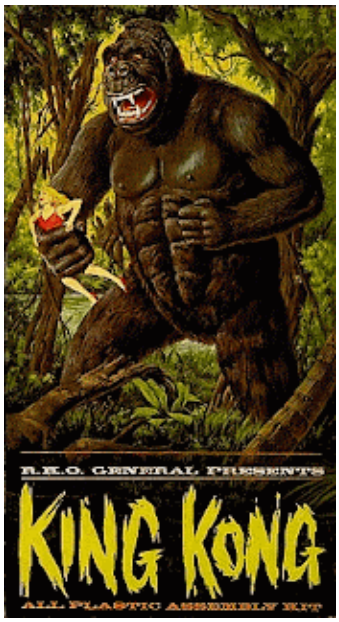
UNIVERSAL PICTURES
PRESENTS
THE
PHANTOM
OF THE OPERA
ALL PLASTIC ASSEMBLY KIT

JEKYLL and HYDE

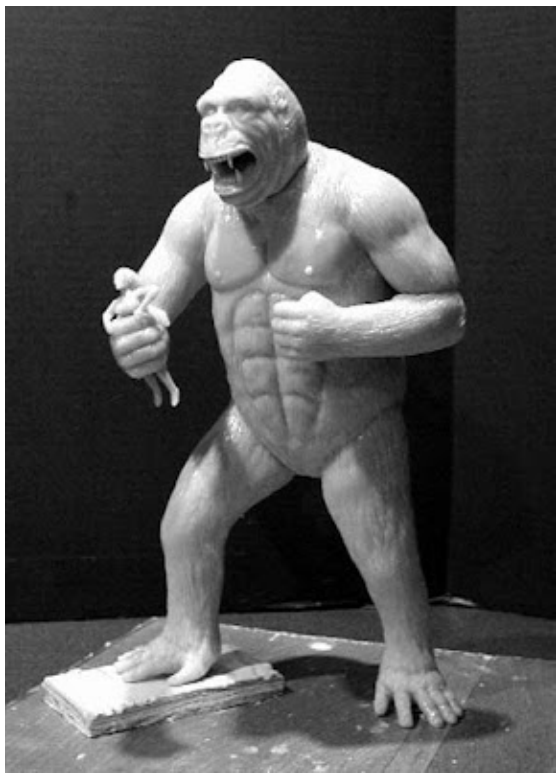


DR. JEKYLL AS MR. HYDE

KING KONG

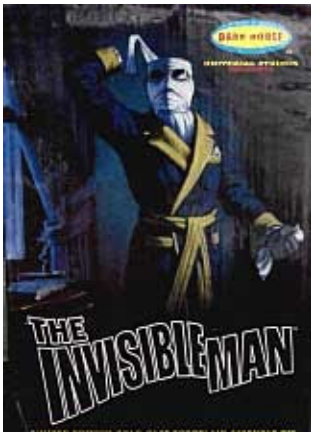

R.K.O. GENERAL PRESENTS
KING KONG
ALL PLASTIC ASSEMBLY KIT

...And the original sculpt.



THE INVISIBLE MAN

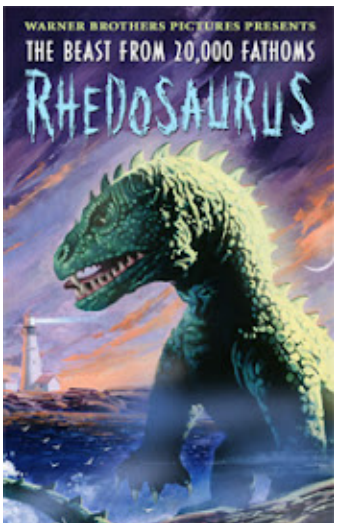
This kit by Dark Horse is in "Aurora shoulda-woulda-coulda" catagory.

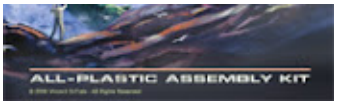


Okay, The above picture on the right and the below shot of the completed kit are from the Dark Horse "Aurora-styled" release of their Invisible Man model. The odd thing here Is that while the above painting on the right was done for a fantasy Aurora Bama-era box (see section below), the differentials between this box-art and the below kit --by 1960s Aurora standards at least-- would be just about right.

"FANTASY AURORA KIT" BOXES

Over at Morbidmonster.com, Pete Von Sholly and Co. have taken the whole "what if?" Aurora query to a whole different level. For the past few years they've been regularly churning out "Fantasy Aurora kit" boxes as shrink-wrapped works of fine art. (Now if we can just get them to spend a few years tooling all the parts to go IN these boxes we'd *really* be in business.) Below are just a few examples of the kind of product they have to offer at present.




ALL-PLASTIC ASSEMBLY KIT

ALL PLASTIC ASSEMBLY KIT

THE Joker
HA!
HA!
HA!
HA!
HA!
HA!
AURORA
ALL-PLASTIC ASSEMBLY KIT

UNIVERSAL PICTURES PRESENTS
THE INVISIBLE MAN
ALL PLASTIC ASSEMBLY KIT

AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL PICTURES PRESENTS
THE SHE-CREATURE
ALL-PLASTIC ASSEMBLY KIT

ALL PLASTIC ASSEMBLY KIT
THEM!

Whew! Allright I'm spent.
For what it's worth, this was going to be a two-part post with the second part being all the Aurora Tribute and fantasy-kit stuff but,... screw it. I've been admittedly lax in posting this Spring (for various reasons) so just consider that I'm making up for lost time. More exotic oddities cool art and and general weirdness coming soon, so stay tuned...

Big kudos and a tip of the hat for this post goes out to Steve Iverson, Cult TV man, Mike Talemal, Pete Von Sholly, Dave Cockrum, KitBuilders Magazine, Monsters in Motion and ...somebody else I probably forgot.

Labels: Aurora, Frankenstein, hobby, kit, model, prehistoric scenes, Wolfman

posted by c. martin croker at 6:53 pm | 5 comments